# Anatomy K

Focusing trans politics on anatomy [by purporting to “solve” trans oppression through hormone therapy] renders gender binary and biological – that whitewashes structural causes of transphobia, creates a standard by which trans bodies are selectively legitimized by the state, and perpetuates dysphoria and otherization of trans folks who either can’t access or don’t want therapy.

#### Filar[[1]](#footnote-1)

So 'transition' [and], 'sex change' or, to some extent, 'coming out' are cis fantasies. They are cis fantasies that obscure the processes by which cis people create their own genders. Whether cis or trans or gender non-conforming, gender is never static. Gender identity has no fixed end point: it is a lifetime of changing feelings, experiences and attitudes. If gender is a set of relationships – to ourselves, to others, to the boxes others put us in – then no adults are the same gender, really, as when they were born, and in ten years they will be different genders still. Medical intervention is not the culmination of a clear process of transition between woman and man or vice versa, it is a set of technologies that help to alleviate body dysphoria at a particular point in time. After the 'transition' is over, there's still a lifetime of gendered experience to have. The myth is that that identity is contained within anatomy: society is fascinated with changing bodies. The lie is that this ritualised gawping is not erotic. As Jacques points out, mainstream media representation of trans people is almost synonymous with the use of sensationalist 'before' and 'after' photos that mask “processes of change, even as they ostensibly reveal them”. Trans peoples' body alterations must be seen. Trans people who do not body modify are ridiculed, or presumed not to exist. This is why some of the UK's more backwards feminists get so het up over the idea of female or lesbian penises – for them, biology is destiny. Even more sympathetic coverage doesn't always avoid the tendency toward spectacle – deviant bodies are simultaneously put on display, and stripped of their agency. In this there are clear parallels with coverage of sex work and sex workers. As [Melissa Gira Grant](http://www.versobooks.com/authors/1838-melissa-gira-grant)writes: “Aside from an origin story of her life “before,” this is where the exposition will be confined: the red light, the bed, the men, the money. Everything else is out of frame.” But trans peoples' understandings of themselves, trans and queer communities' takes on gender, are far more developed than any other. We understand the expansive possibilities for gender expressions and experiences beyond and outside of the binary, or within it. The challenge that we present to the cis mainstream is to question not just how bodies and identities relate, but how gender identities are organised around the regulation of populations into life and death: while trans women of colour are streamlined, often, toward death, white cis men make the decisions that put them there. Fixation on the sex change obscures a whole realm of trans experiences that may have little to do with genitals. This the context in which Trans emerges: claiming the right to self-define, to self-represent. In this it sits within the canon of trans memoirs, most famously Lili Elbe's Man into Woman and Jan Morris'Conundrum, self-authored life stories framed around being trans. Jacques sets the book up against the 'born in the wrong body' stereotype – and in doing so tries to escape from the genre's usual constraints. It is more than trope of "‘unhappy girl’ trapped ‘in the wrong body’ becomes happy woman after medical intervention"—there is art, music, there is experimentation with the trans memoir form. But by framing the book around her reassignment surgery, Jacques steps out with only limited success. Still, it's a double bind: do you start your book with what people will find most interesting/appalling, what people see as the epitome of the trans experience, or refuse to and lose readers? Will cis people still care when we stop showing them what's in our pants?

Puberty suppressors are incredibly expensive – guarantees the plan will only benefit the ultra-privileged.

#### Selva ’11[[2]](#footnote-2)

In transgender youth, puberty blockers are used to suppress the endogenous pubertal changes that quite often worsen the individual’s gender dysphoria. In addition, by not being exposed to one’s own sex hormones, cross hormone therapy is even more effective at achieving the desired physical appearance in gender transition. How Much Do They Cost and Are They Covered by Insurance? These agents (medicines) are expensive. Typically, Depot-Lupron costs range from around $700 (online) to $800 (Portland area) to $1,5[k]00 dollars a month elsewhere for the monthly preparation. The 3 month preparation is equivalent in price. The histrelin implant is approximately $15[k],000 total for the device and the cost of surgically implanting it. Also, labs need to be monitored while on these agents. A pre-treatment LH, FSH and testosterone or estradiol level is checked, as well as a post treatment level to assess the level of suppression. Some health insurance will cover them partially in cross gender treatment, and some won’t. As a result, the out of pocket cost of these agents [are] can be quite substantial.

Generic state good arguments aren’t responsive – piecemeal reform in this context allows rich white trans folks to assimilate at the expense of an impoverished, racialized underclass. Trans women of color continue to face massive violence but the plan allows complicit cis folks to point at Caitlyn Jenner and say “we gave you an option!” The Aff’s illusion of care only legitimizes continued discrimination faced by post-Aff trans people on the basis of their appearance, because they had the “option” of changing their gender.

#### Filar[[3]](#footnote-3)

Trans lives are structured by dehumanising constraints invented by cis people. These [that] regulate how you are and aren't allowed to be trans, through lawmaking and medical institutions. Just to live while trans requires supplication to stigmatising state processes; it is invariably compulsory to state your gender when doing anything 'official': opening a bank account, renting a room and getting a job are just three examples. Amnesty International’s 2014 report ‘The state decides who I am: lack of legal recognition for transgender people in Europe’ details how “in several European countries, including Belgium, Denmark, France, Italy and Norway, transgender people cannot obtain new documents reflecting their gender identity unless they undergo genital reassignment surgeries” and sterilization. For many trans people, there are more important things than gender reassignment surgery. Particularly if you are of colour, being trans disproportionately means experiencing poverty, unemployment, homelessness, state violence and male violence. It means being subject to a wildly high rate of mental ill health: one survey found that 48% of trans youth had tried to kill themselves, in comparison to 6% of young people generally. Meanwhile, wanting gender freedom is considered more pathological than believing, against all the evidence, that people divide neatly into two unchanging types. Only last week the UK Ministry of Justice declined to extend legal recognition to non-binary gender identities despite being petitioned by over 30,000 people, stating that they did not see non-binary people facing “any specific detriment.” As [Nat Raha explains](http://www.versobooks.com/blogs/2245-the-limits-of-trans-liberalism), the liberal trans-activist push towards political rights, “viciously reproduce[s] socio-economic divisions along intersecting lines of race and class, gender, sexuality, dis/ability, nationality and immigration status.” While any meaningful trans movement must look past rights to radical action – at a basic level, lacking legal recognition means that non-binary people are closeted by law. To be trans is to have the fight against gender oppression inscribed on your body. Jacques points out that the difficult part is not living as the gender(s) you identify with, it is living in a neoliberal patriarchal society. It is facing down the simultaneous fascination and horror with which many people regard the idea of stepping out of an assigned gender box. Intrusive personal questioning and the disproportionate murder rate of trans women of colour are two ends of a spectrum that offers up trans lives for examination through the scrutiny of our bodies.

The alternative is to reject the Aff’s fixation on anatomy to affirm gender self-determination – a collective praxis of becoming that locates freedom beyond the constrictive frames of legal recognition.

#### Stanley[[4]](#footnote-4)

Gender self-determination is a collective praxis against the brutal pragmatism of the present, the liquidation of the past, and the austerity of the future. That is to say, it indexes a horizon of possibility already here, which struggles to make freedom flourish through a radical trans politics. Not only a defensive posture, it builds in the name of the undercommons a world beyond the world, lived as a dream of the good life.1 Within at least the US context, the normalizing force of mainstream trans politics, under the cover of equality, operates by consolidation and exile. Or put another way, through its fetishistic attachment to the law and its vicissitudes, mainstream trans politics [it] argues for inclusion in the same formations of death that have already claimed so many. This collusion can be seen in the lobbying for the addition of ‘‘gender identity’’ to federal hate crimes enhancements. While the quotidian violence many trans people face—in particular trans women of color—is the material of daily life, this push for the expansion of the prison-industrial complex through hate crimes legislation proliferates violence under the name of safety. Legislative and semilegislative apparatuses from the United Nations and NGOs to local governance have begun to include similar language around “gender equity.” Champions of such moves might cite the Yogyakarta Principles (2007), which are the findings of a human rights commission convened to foreground ‘‘Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity’’ globally, or such recent decisions as that of the Australian government to add a third gender option of ‘‘X’’ to their passports as signs of progress. However, an ethic of gender self-determination helps us to resist reading these biopolitical shifts as victories. Here the state and its interlocutors, including at times trans studies, work[s] to translate and in turn confine the excesses of gendered life into managed categories at the very moment of radical possibility.2 To begin with the ‘‘self’’ in the wake of neoliberalism might seem a dangerous place to turn a phrase, especially one that is suggested to offer such radical potentiality—and perhaps it is. After all, the ‘‘self ’’ in our contemporary moment points most easily toward the fiction of the fully possessed rights-bearing subject of Western modernity, the foil of the undercommons. However, here it is not the individual but a collective self, an ontological position always in relation to others and dialectically forged in otherness, that is animated. The negation of this collective self, as relational and nonmimetic, is the alibi for contemporary rights discourse, which argues that discrete legal judgments will necessarily produce progressive change. Rather than believe that this is an oversight of the state form, critics of human rights discourse remind us that this substitution is a precondition of the state’s continued power. Antagonistic to such practices of constriction and universality, gender self-determination is affectively connected to the practices and theories of self-determination embodied by various and ongoing anticolonial, Black Power, and antiprison movements. For Frantz Fanon and many others, the violence of colonialism and antiblackness are so totalizing that ontology itself collapses; thus the claiming of a self fractures the everydayness of colonial domination. The Black Panther Party for Self Defense echoed a similar perspective in their 1966 Ten Point Plan. Self-determination, for the Panthers and for many others, is the potentiality of what gets called freedom. Connecting these histories, ‘‘gender self-determination is queer liberation is prison abolition’’ was articulated by the gender and queer liberation caucus of CR10, Critical Resistance’s tenth anniversary conference in 2008 (The CR10 Publications Collective, 2008: 7). To center radical black, anticolonial, and prison abolitionist traditions is to already be inside trans politics.3 From STAR’s (Street Transvestite Action Revolutionaries) alliance with the Young Lords in New York City and the recent organizing against US drone attacks led by trans women in Sukkur, Pakistan, to Miss Major’s words that anoint this essay, these forms of gender self-determination, even if left unnamed, argue that national liberation and the overthrow of colonial and carceral rule must be grown together with gender liberation (see Littauer 2012). Gender self-determination opens up space for multiple embodiments and their expressions by collectivizing the struggle against both interpersonal and state violence. Further, it pushes us away from building a trans politics on the fulcrum of realness (gender normative, trans, or otherwise) while also responding to the different degrees of harm people are forced to inhabit. As a nonprescriptive politics, its contours cannot always be known in advance—it is made and remade in the process of its actualization, in the time of resistance and in the place of pleasure. Becoming, then, as Gilles Deleuze might have it—or more importantly, as Miss Major lives it (Stanley and Smith 2011)—is the moment of gender self-determination: becoming liberated as we speak.

The ballot should prioritize the most vulnerable—legal reform strengthens institutions by creating an illusion of protection that operates through the sacrifice of the most vulnerable and whitewashes complicity in transphobic structures.

#### Spade[[5]](#footnote-5)

Our policy reform work also needs to come from this perspective. Changing key laws and policies that impact the survival of our communities is important, but must be done with care to avoid the dangers of legitimizing and expanding oppressive systems. When we seek to reform oppressive institutions, we have to ask ourselves how the reforms we are considering, or the various compromise positions we might be pushed into, will impact the most vulnerable people in our communities. For example, if we are trying to get a discriminating system to recognize trans people's genders, but they want to use a [certain] surgery standard, recognize that this type of policy is not a victory for our community. Most trans people do not want to access such health care, and surgery-reliant policies shore up the stereotype that access to such care defines trans people’s identities. Changing a law or policy from one transphobic position (trans people do not exist/cannot be recognized) to another (trans people can be recognized only through surgery) can actually make[s] it harder to push for a policy that is based on the reality of trans people’s lives, dividing our communities along the lines of class, race, and gender.

1. http://www.versobooks.com/blogs/2249-is-it-a-man-or-a-woman-transitioning-and-the-cis-gaze-by-ray-filar [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Karin Selva [M.D., Pediatric Endocrinologist, Randall Children’s Hospital at Legacy Emanuel, Portland, OR] “Puberty Blockers and Puberty Inhibitors” TransActive Gender Center, 2011. http://www.transactiveonline.org/resources/youth/puberty-blockers.php [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. http://www.versobooks.com/blogs/2249-is-it-a-man-or-a-woman-transitioning-and-the-cis-gaze-by-ray-filar [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Eric Stanley, “Gender Self-Determination,” TSQ: Trans Studies Quarterly, Vol. 1-2, pp 89-92. 2014. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Dean Spade [Assistant professor at Seattle University School of Law]. “Trans Law Reform Strategies, Co-Optation, and the Potential for Transformative Change.” 2009. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)